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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews selected literature focusing on the general psychological theme of discipline, relates findings to educational contexts, and makes recommendations about how problems of discipline and punishment of children can be resolved in schools. Three approaches to discipline are identified: punishment, control by enforcing obedience, and training that corrects and strengthens. Of the three, the author argues that while punishment is the most widely acclaimed solution to discipline problems, research by several psychologists (including Thorndike, Skinner, Estes, and Church) points out limitations of punishment as a technique for stopping behavior and that other researchers have found paradoxical effects of punishment. The effectiveness of punishment as a behavioral control is conceived as being determined by: (1) appropriate timing, (2) the existence of an alternate response, (3) the relationship of the punishing agent to the offender, and (4) the extent to which punishment is used. Research findings related to these determinants are additionally reviewed, and guidelines are offered for parents, teachers, and school counselors. (RH)

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A COUNSELLING APPROACH TO PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN: A REVIEW.

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The objective of this paper is to review the general psychological theme of discipline, bearing in mind the problems of its application to learning. This paper will also conclude by recommending to counselors how the problems of discipline and punishment of children of children can be resolved in schools.

Discipline can be categorized into the following: punishment; control by enforcing obedience; and training that corrects and strengthens. While most people believe that punishment is the only solution to discipline problems, some others believe that it is only through strict control that discipline can be maintained. And a smaller percentage of people are of the opinion that it is only through training which corrects and strengthens behavior that discipline can be maintained. Although all the categories may be correct, some are more effective than others.

Discipline, when used for children, means keeping children in line. Most teachers and parents I have interviewed in Bendel State of Nigeria defined discipline as:

1) "The development of the faculties of the mind--growth of reasoning power and acquisition of knowledge."

2) "The establishment of law and order, rules and standards and obedience to authority. It is a series of unfortunate problems, interlopers on the educational scene, which do not necessarily belong in the educational system."

It is amazing that discipline is usually considered from the authority's point of view. A more meaningful definition should embrace both the views of the authority and the participating subjects, who are often left out in answering the question, "What is discipline?". Discipline, therefore, can be defined as all things done by the home and the school, and by parents and teachers, to

help children learn intelligent self-direction; and all the things children to to practice it. Discipline helps children to learn mature, responsible ways of behavior."

It is a strong assumption held by many parents and teachers that if children are punished, and if they are directed and controlled, they will develop self-discipline. The day-to-day concepts of discipline are based partly on sound principles and partly on wishful thinking. The knowledge of research conducted in educational psychology has made sound principles very popular. H. Clay Lindgren in his book, Educational Psychology in the Classroom, claimed:

> "It is true that children need control and direction, but it improbable that they can learn self-control and self-direction if they are controlled and directed all the time and at every turn."[1]

Since punishment is the most widely acclaimed solution to discipline, a review of research conducted on punishment is considered to be of great value in this paper. In general, a response is punished when some painful stimulation is made contingent upon the response. Although punishment is administered to ongoing behavior in order to stop it, things do not always work this way, as can be seen in some of the research to be mentioned.

E.L. Thorndile dominated the experiments on punishment for a very long time. He was mostly concerned with the influence of verbal praise and reproof upon behavior.

In his earliest writings he adopted the general common sense view, which claims that punishment has a weakening effect upon behavior. But in 1932 he reexamined his first stand and concluded that punishment really has no weakening effect upon behavior.

In order to arrive at the later conclusion he argued that wherever punishment appears to weaken a response, it is an indirect

effect. Punishment may or may not weaken a response. This argument is true in that if a response is rewarded, it is apparent that repetition of this response will be rewarding, but if a response is punished, it is not clear which of the other available responses will be rewarded. In effect, punishment tells a person what not to do, but it does not tell the individual what particular alternative course of behavior should be followed. This argument can be extended by asking what happens when the only response that is appropriate for a particular motivational state of affairs is punished.

Skinner (1938) studied the effect of punishment upon the lever-pressing response in the Skinner box. In Skinner's experiment the punishment was a sharp slap on the paws from the lever itself. He used four rats, two of which were punished while the other two were not. In order to measure the effects of the punishment, Skinner obtained extinction curves for the four sets following training with a fixed-interval schedule of reinforcement. The result was that the two rats slapped at the beginning of extinction were slow in their rate of responding. As a matter of fact, the punishment suppressed the response entirely for a while. But by the time extinction was complete, the punished rats had caught up with the unpunished rats in terms of the total number of responses emitted. According to Skinner's interpretation of the result of the experiment, punishment has only a temporary effect upon behavior.

Estes (1944) did an intensive investigation on the factors which affect punishment of an isolated instrumental response. This experiment was also done on the rat in a lever-pressing situation,

but instead of Skinner's slap, he substituted the electric shock. The punishment was delivered through a lever. The rats who were used to receiving food as a reinforcer to the lever-pressing sometimes received shock. Estes, in his findings, claimed that the effect of punishment was primarily upon the rate of responding rather than upon the overall tendency to emit a particular response. Estes also found that if the punishment was intense enough or lasted long enough, there was a slight permanent depression in the total number of responses the animals would emit. It can be concluded from this finding that punishment could not eliminate the extinction curve completely. The rats in this experiment always came back to respond after punishment, even though they were not reinforced.

Other researchers concluded from Estes' experiment that the result of the partial punishment is more or less like the results of partial reinforcement (Azrin, 1956; Azrin, Holz, and Hake, 1963; Boe, 1971).

While the works of Skinner and Estes can be described as experiments on punishment which reduces at least temporarily the strength of the response that is being punished, other researchers conducted experiments which were based on some parameters of punishment. Church (1967) in a similar lever experiment using shock also discovered that recovery from suppression can be almost complete, provided the intensity of the punishment is not too great. Under such a condition, an animal tends to return to its pre-punishment level of responding in spite of the fact that the punishment continues. With this new finding, and the findings of Skinner and Estes, it can be concluded that punishment does not seem to have a permanent effect on the persistence of behavior. There can also be temporary

suppressive effects of punishment upon behavior when behavior is not being rewarded at the time that punishment is administered. Under the last condition, behavior may be suppressed as long as punishment occurs, but once punishment is removed, the suppression is over.

Other experiments on punishment included: Solomon (1964) on "The Use of Punishment as a Cure"; Hoz and Azrin (1961), who demonstrated that an electric shock can function in exactly the same way as a buzzer or a light in simple discriminate learning; Church (1963), who demonstrated another aspect of punishment as a cure; Fowler and Wischner (1967), who claimed that shock for correct responses is especially beneficial in solving difficult, as compared with easy, discriminations; Fargo and Fowler (1972), who emphasized the feedback properties of shock, as opposed to neutral stimuli, for correct choices; and Brown, Martin and Morrow (1964), who demonstrated in their experiment another example of the elicitation of behavior by punishment in an apparently paradoxical fashion. Their experiment became popularly known as the "vicious-cycle behavior" experiment.

Research has also been carried out on the effectiveness of punishment on children and adolescents. Certain theories can be postulated in this paper which are not unconnected with the effectiveness of punishment. These theories are reviews of the most popular of such theoretical orientations, which include the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis I--The effectiveness of punishment as a behavioral control is determined by the appropriate timing of the punishment.

Hypothesis II--The effectiveness of punishment as a behavioral control is determined by the presence of an alternative to the punished response.

Hypothesis III-The effectiveness of punishment as a behavioral control is determined by the relationship of the punishing agent to the offender.

Hypothesis IV--The effectiveness of punishment as a behavioral control depends mostly on its use. If used excessively in any particular situation, it becomes aversive.

Hypothesis I: Several researches have been conducted to prove that timing determines the effectiveness of punishment as a behavior control. The earlier a punishment occurs in a deviant response sequence, the more effectively will it prevent the subsequent commission of the act (Yoloye, 1973). One thing peculiar to the promptness of punishment is its restriction to the determining of avoidance responses habit-breaking by means of punishment and is a case of habit training or conditioning. Broadbent ( ) lends credence to the idea that human beings will not respond well to punishment given in no apparent relation to their behavior. Punishments given late cannot stop any activity which gains an immediate reward. The reason, according to Broadbent, is that the original connection between action and punishment fails to establish itself clearly. According to Mowrer's theory as regards the control of behavior, "Organisms generally do not behave in any way unless there is some kind of stimulation present. Behavior generally amounts to coping with or getting rid of stimulation so that a state of quiet balance of homeostatics is reached. The homeostatic nature of needs may arise from psychological disturbances, but more typically they are aroused by particular events in the environment that offer certain threats of promises to the individual."[2]

According to Murray also, Behaviour, either appropriate or inappropriate behaviour is stimulated and maintained to achieve a homoestatic balance. Hypothesis II: The effectiveness of punishment as a behavioural control is determined by the presence of an alternative to the punishment response. Researchers in this area include Mullenson 1967, O'Connor 1968 and Thorensen 1973.

Mullenson contended that if school children are denied sufficient opportunity for physical activity, they are likely to be over-active. This is why many children of domineering parents tend to misbehave most of the time when they are away from their parents. But once the restrictive environment is altered, the children tend to be more relaxed. In a way, the punishment behaviour would disappear as it is replaced by a desirable form of behaviour. Similarly, when several responses can produce positive reinforcement in the same situation, punishment of one response may facilitate a shift in behaviour and if arranged judiciously, aid acquistion of new behaviour patterns. O'Connor 1968 maintains that a punishment which stops an activity long enough for another to be started may be effective if alternatives are readily available for new learning.

Thorensen in 1973 claimed that if an inappropriate behaviour is punished and if that behaviour is the only option the individual has, he will continue to resort to it as the opportunity offers itself.

A parent who says 'No' firmly and then offers an alternative may be providing all the punishment necessary. The mother who says 'No' and provides no alternative or explain why she said 'No' will probably do little to extinguish the undesired behaviour because the mother has done nothing to provide new motivation so that the child can be selectively active in a way, for it is common knowledge that a lively

creature will usually be active in some way.

Hypothesis III: The effectiveness of punishment is determined by the relationship of the punishing agent to the offender. Researchers on this hypothesis include: Derek Wright (1963). When an adult punishes a child, the prior relationship will influence the effectiveness of punishment.

Most developmental psychologists have expressed the view that close attachments to one or two adults during the first years of life greatly facilitate the development of self-control and it can be argued that without such attachments, conscience is inevitably stunted. Accordint to many developmental psychologists this is the period when the child wants and needs to be accepted so very badly by adults, mostly the parents or any adults to which the child feels highly attached. This is also the period when most children will struggle to help and do nice things in order to be praised. If these children are frustrated at this stage it may effect their feelings towards normal or abnormal behaviours in the future.

Through these attachments also, children readily copy the adults or parents to whom they feel so highly attached. Parents who fight all the time should not be surprised if their children grow up, feeling highly insecured with disturbed personalities. Without such attachments, the child will learn to be prudent in avoiding punishment but he is unlikely to acquire the capacity to resist the temptation to misbehave when the chances of being found out looks slim.

Bessett, Crane and Walker in 1967 assumed that:

"Punishment will really be effective only in so far as there already exists a positive, mutually accepting relationship between the two persons concerned. (The one who gave and the one who receives") 4

There is also an assumption that punishment may be given but not received. It can be received only within a framework of positive relationship and trust. If this relationship and trust does not exist, punishment might result in temporary compliance, but it has little or no permanent educative value.

Hypothesis IV states that: the effectiveness of punishment as a behavioural control depends mostly on its use. If used excessively in any particular situation, it becomes aversive. The child's concept of fair-play and justice is greatly associated with trust. The punishment should therefore, be comparative to the offence committed. Punishment is an important antecedent of aggression in a almost every child. It is very difficult to interpret to what extent punishment can affect aggression in children but the nature of the punishment may increase or decrease the strength of the aggression.

Bandura and Walters, (1963) claim that punishment depending in part on the nature increases or decreases the strength of the aggressive tendencies, and, too, it inhibits their overt expression. It has been claimed by many researchers that children tend to find the parental authorities rather restrictive and frustrating. According to Whiting, Nowlis and Sears (1953) children tend to react with some degree of aggression providing that it actually serves the retaliatory function of paining and annoying parents. As can be seen by parents' anger or punitive responses.

Hollenberg and Sperry (1951) and Sears (1951) in separate research findings also concluded that children who are most severely punished at home exhibit the highest level of latent hostility in doll play aggression whereas those children who are subjected to the least material punishment exhibit the least amount of doll play aggression. Bandura and Waters (1963) in their research also concluded that severe

punitiveness towards aggression in the home is frequently associated with high incidence of aggression outside the home. Children who are severely punished for aggression (Mussen & Naylor, 1954) exhibit much fantasy aggression but relatively little overt aggression. Whiting & Child (1953) in a cross-cultural study claimed that in cultures where parents administer much punishment for aggression during early socialization, adults tend to be relatively aggressive and hence manifest a great deal of anxiety about aggressiveness. The research findings of Redl and Wireman (1951) also emphasized that if in particular cases, punishment is also unreasonably harsh, capricious, discriminatory or indicative of rejection, children tend to develop a deep sense of resentment which may find indirect expression in bullying, cruelty to other children and animals and delinquency.

DISCUSSION

From the on going review it seems very clear that parents are expected to play a more important role in the discipline of their children. This is so because the need for discipline occurs in situations where the child is concerned with routines of daily living, in the establishment of sibling and adult relationships, and in displaying behaviour which adults deem appropriate. Parents also occupy a strategic position. The parent is one of the most appropriate agents for applying whatever coersive measures are necessary for effecting conformity of the child's behaviour to the changed patterns of expectations. Considering the earlier findings in this paper about punishment and children's aggression there is need for caution on the part of the parents, teachers and school counsellors, they cannot afford to be too permissive either.

When parents are too permissive another problem is created for the child. Every child needs discipline from the standpoint of

emotional security. Without unambigious standards of social reality in relation to which the child can orient his behaviour and also control his impulses, without which the child feels confused and insecure. The absence of discipline which is also referred to as external standards places the heavy burden on the child's limited degree of self control, attitudinal sopnistication and maturity. When the child is allowed to decide for himself or create order for himself in a completely permissive environment, he becomes afraid of the consequences of his own uninhibited behaviour.

Since the child does not operate at an early eage in the level of logical consistency, it is necessary for parents to note that ambiguous control cannot be avoided unless the discipline of the child consists of punishment as well as reward. The use of disciplinary techniques on children which attempt to change the child's behaviour by appealing to his need for affection and self esteem seem to be more promising and effective means of discipling children than physical coercion and shame which normally leads to externally controlled and authority-regulated conduct in children.

Although many adults believe in the biblical saying "spare the rod and spank the child" or "in the heart of children is a madness and corporal punishment is the only cure." Many parents have even gone to the extent of claiming that it is the stoppage of corporal punishments in schools which has been responsible for the moral laxity in the society. They tend to forget that the children are just a reflection of the indiscipline which is the order of the day within the entire society. But in a situation where some parents, teachers or counsellors are themselves not disciplined it is not surprising to see their children demonstrating the same indisciplines.

A greater percentage of adults have condemned psychological findings on punishment. This is so because they are not really aware of what these psychological findings are all about.

In order to enlighten parents and teachers on punishment, it is pertinent at this juncture to treat the findings of psychologist on parental aggression on children. Psychologists have never claimed that punishment should be abandoned. Instead researches have been conducted on parental brutality - parents who over-punished their children; in such cases the parent may be sadistic or over-reacting on other issues and project their problems on the children. The punishment a child receives from a loving father, may be demonstrated in the way the father held the child, talked to him before and after the punishment and the facial expression. As a result of children's sensitive abilities one child is able to sense the destructive or sadistic quality of the punishment while the other child has no reason to doubt his father's love. This is more so because this single instance of punishment is only one among innumerable behaviours the child has experienced which have formed his picture of his father and his reaction to him.

In instances when fathers even refused to physically punish the child perhaps because he is afraid of his wife or the relations or because of his moralistic conviction, the non-violent behaviour may produce the same reaction because his eyes convey to the child the same sadistic impulse which his hands could have done in beating the child.

Another common behaviour of aggressive parents is shouting. The father who shouts may not only be angry, he may be frightened because he suffers from a deep sense of impotence which is a result of the inability to cut off the ties from mother and is emotionally

still a little child. Most people that show rage may portray the expression of frightened helplessness, rather than only at the rage.

It is hoped that surrogate family staff in a mental home setting will also benefit from some of the causes of the mental illness of the patients. While some children are able to handle punishment in any form from parents, it is a cause or constant reminder of mental illness for some unfortuante children who even in adolescence or adult age are unable to handle punishment in any form.

Many therapists who deal with the mentally ill often back off from confronting their patients on the issue of punishment. They do this successfully when they are able to make the mentally ill patients realize that it is the act rather than the person that has been rebuked. Parents and concerned adults can learn from this. In many cases the person who is insecure or feels easily threatened tend to forget any rebuke. Such a person cannot see why certain actions on their part are being rebuked.

FOOTNOTES

1. Lindgreen, H.C., Educational Psychology in the Classroom, p. 349.

2. Yoloye, E.A., "The Role of Education in Our Changing Society with Special Emphasis on Discipline," The Nation Builder (A Nigerian Educational Journal), Vol. 3, April, 1973, pps. 23-27. Based on Hall and Lindzey's presentation.

3. Cited in Bolls, [illegible]R., "Theory of Motivation," 2nd Edition, n.d.

4. Bessett, G.W. et al. Headmasters for Better Schools, 2nd Edition.

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